

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
20 December 2001 (20.12.2001)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 01/96981 A2

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: **G06F**
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/US01/18975
- (22) International Filing Date: 13 June 2001 (13.06.2001)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
09/593,309 13 June 2000 (13.06.2000) US
- (71) Applicant: **COMERGENT TECHNOLOGIES, INC.**
[US/US]; 1201 Radio Road, Redwood City, CA 94065 (US).
- (72) Inventors: **YORK, William, Michael**; 1380 Montclair Way, Los Altos, CA 94024 (US). **HOPPE, Eric, Andrew**; 913 Willow Glen Way, San Jose, CA 95125 (US). **LE,**

Hung, Hoang; 104 Montelena Court, Mountain View, CA 94040 (US).

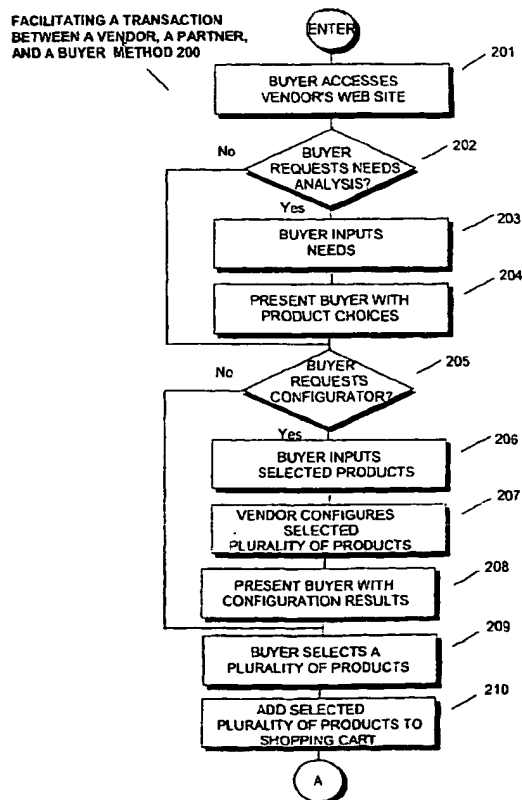
(74) Agent: **DENIRO, Kirk, J.**; Vierra Magen Marcus Harmon & DeNiro LLP, Suite 540, 685 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94105-4206 (US).

(81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.

(84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: A METHOD, SYSTEM, AND COMPUTER READABLE MEDIUM FOR FACILITATING A TRANSACTION BETWEEN A MANUFACTURER, A DISTRIBUTOR, AND A RESELLER



(57) Abstract: A method, system, and computer readable medium for facilitating a transaction in a complex sales model which includes at least one buyer, at least one partner, and at least one vendor is provided. A buyer accesses a vendor web site to obtain information on a plurality of products in a single purchase encounter. The vendor may configure the plurality of products selected by the buyer to ensure compatibility. The vendor may also provide promotional information. The buyer obtains price and availability information from a variety of partners. The buyer then selects a partner from multiple partners to supply the plurality of products. A selected partner may also provide the buyer with promotional information. The partner then ships the plurality of products to the buyer. The buyer may also be a reseller.



Published:

— without international search report and to be republished
upon receipt of that report

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

**A METHOD, SYSTEM, AND COMPUTER READABLE MEDIUM FOR
5 FACILITATING A TRANSACTION BETWEEN A MANUFACTURER, A
DISTRIBUTOR, AND A RESELLER**

Claim of Priority

10 The present application claims priority to U.S. Nonprovisional
Patent Application Serial No. 09/593,309, entitled, "A Method, System,
and Computer Readable Medium for Facilitating a Transaction Between
a Manufacturer, a Distributor, and a Reseller", which application was filed
on June 13, 2000.

15

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to selling a product via a complex
sales model.

20 **Background of the Invention**

Each entity in a complex sales model provides value in ultimately
selling a product to an end user.

A vendor or entity which constructs, originates, assembles or
processes a product is typically a first entity in a complex sales model.
25 For example, a computer network components manufacturer may be a
first entity in a complex sales model. A vendor usually has the most
recent information about its product and its product capabilities as well as
to which of its manufactured products are compatible. In other words,
the vendor has the most up-to-date information as to whether
30 manufactured product A can function with manufactured product B.

Product compatibility and functionality often change as existing products are modified and new products are manufactured and such information may not be readily available to other entities in the complex sales channel. Further, vendors often provide promotional offers such as reduced prices for large volume customers based on changing market conditions. A partner of the vendor which would like to sell the vendor's product to a buyer may not have complete or current functionality information or may have to wait days to confirm compatibility and/or pricing information. Accordingly, a partner such as a distributor may lose a potential sale.

A partner of a vendor typically has a business relationship with multiple vendors and sells a plurality of products to a buyer. The plurality of products may be produced from one vendor or multiple vendors. For example, a partner may be a computer network distributor which purchases network components from multiple computer network component vendors. A distributor will typically buy one or more products from one vendor and one or more products from another vendor and sell products from multiple vendors to a buyer. The partner could also sell the plurality of products to a reseller or installer which ultimately sells the plurality of products to a consumer. The distributor often has price and availability information for the products, but not detailed technical and functional information about the product. A partner may also be an entity which provides financing, or inventory.

A buyer is interested in purchasing the products in a timely manner. For example, a buyer may be a reseller which specializes in selling computer networks to specific industries, such as the military. The reseller knows industry specific requirements and market conditions. The reseller generally is interested in having the products delivered in the shortest amount of time. The reseller, like the partner, wastes valuable time in attempting to identify suitable product availability and price

information from multiple partners and then purchase the product. Similarly, as with the partner, the reseller may lose sales or spend large amounts of time obtaining accurate functional/technical, pricing and availability information about the product. Likewise, the reseller may take
5 a large amount of time purchasing the selected product by filling out paperwork or making multiple telephone calls, e-mails or faxes.

Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a system, method and an article of manufacture which allows a buyer to experience a single purchasing encounter, even when the transaction may involve multiple
10 entities, such as manufacturers and distributors. It is also desirable to improve the quantity and quality of business information flow among channel sales entities. This increased business information flow would (1) expand distribution channel sales by making it easier and quicker to purchase products, (2) allow for cross-selling and up-selling opportunities
15 by allowing each entity an opportunity to distinguish themselves from other entities, (3) shorten sales and delivery cycles, and (4) monitor rapid change in customer demand in order to allow an entity to be more responsive to the marketplace.

20 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention can be accomplished using hardware, software, or a combination of both hardware and software. The software used for the present invention is stored on one or more processor readable storage media including hard disk drives, CD-ROMs, DVDs,
25 optical disks, floppy disks, tape drives, RAM, ROM or other suitable storage devices. In alternative embodiments, some or all of the software can be replaced by dedicated hardware including custom integrated circuits, gate arrays, FPGAs, PLDs, and special purpose computers.

These and other objects and advantages of the present invention
30 will appear more clearly from the following description in which the

preferred embodiment of the invention has been set forth in conjunction with the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

5 Fig. 1 illustrates a simple block diagram of a system, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

 Figs. 2-3 is a flow chart of software for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, partner and buyer, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

10 Figs. 4-5 is a flow chart of software for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, a partner, a reseller, and a customer, according to an embodiment of the present invention; and,

 Fig. 6 illustrates a view of a vendor's web site page, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

15

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

 A real-time method for facilitating a transaction between at least one buyer, at least one partner, and at least one vendor having a
20 computer is provided. The method includes the step of inputting into the computer, from the vendor, information regarding a plurality of products. A buyer then inputs into the computer a first and second selected product in the plurality of products. A partner then inputs into the computer an availability of the first and second products as well as an
25 offer price. The buyer inputs an acceptance into the computer of the offer price and the computer outputs the acceptance to the partner.

 According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of assisting the buyer in selecting the first and second products.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of verifying by the computer that the first and second products are compatible.

5 According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of inputting into the computer, by the partner and/or the vendor, promotional information associated with the first and second products which is viewable by the buyer.

According to yet another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of providing the first and second
10 products from a partner to the buyer.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the buyer uses a browser for providing an acceptance of the offer price.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of adding the first and second
15 products to a shopping cart.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the partner is a first distributor and there is a second distributor and the inputting of availability and price steps include inputting availability and price from the first and second distributors, respectively.

20 According to another embodiment of the present invention, the buyer is a customer.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the buyer is a reseller.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the
25 method further comprises redirecting the buyer's browser to a partner's web site after the acceptance of the offer.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method steps are at least partially executed by computer software programmed in JavaTM program language and/or executed by using an
30 XML structured documents.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the step of accessing a vendor's database to obtain a buyer's profile and wherein price and promotion information is presented to the buyer based on the buyer's profile.

5 According to another embodiment of the present invention, a computer for facilitating a transaction between a manufacturer, at least one distributor, at least one reseller and a customer is provided. The computer comprises a storage device coupled to a processor. The storage device stores a program for controlling the processor. The
10 processor operates with the program to: (1) present manufacturer information regarding a plurality of products; (2) receive an order including a first and second product; (3) configure the first and second products; (4) receive an availability of the first and second products from at least one distributor; (5) provide a price of the first and second
15 products to the at least one buyer from at least one distributor; (6) provide an offer to at least one buyer from at least one distributor, including the availability and the price of the first and second products; and, (7) receive an acceptance of the offer from the at least one buyer.

 According to another embodiment of the present invention,
20 a persistent storage device stores a reseller's profile information.

 According to another embodiment of the present invention, a system for facilitating the transaction between at least one reseller, at least one distributor, and at least one manufacturer is provided. A first processing device presents information regarding a plurality of products.
25 A second processing device, coupled to the first processing device, views the plurality of products and selects a first and second product. A third processing device, coupled to the first processing device, provides a first price and a first availability of the first and second products to the first processing device. The first processing device then provides the
30 first price and the first availability to the second processing device. The

first processing device redirects the second processing device to the third processing device. The third processing device receives an acceptance from the second processing device.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the first processing device includes a manufacturing computer, the second processing device includes a reseller computer, and the third processing device includes a distributor computer.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, a method for providing a plurality of products to a buyer is provided. A buyer selects a first and a second product from a first downloadable file from a web site of a vendor. The buyer views multiple offers of price and availability from multiple respective partners. The buyer accepts an offer in a second downloadable file containing a price and availability of the first and second products available from a partner.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method further comprises the buyer responding to a second downloadable file from the web site of the vendor which confirms the compatibility of the first and second products.

An article of manufacture including a computer readable medium for providing a transaction between a buyer, a vendor, and a partner is provided. A software program presents information regarding a plurality of products. A software program then receives a selected first and second product of the plurality of products. A software program then obtains a first price and a first availability of a first and second product from a partner processing device. A software program then presents the first price and first availability of the first and second products from the partner processing device to the buyer. A software program then receives a selected partner from the buyer.

Other aspects and advantages of the present invention can be seen upon review of the figures, the detailed description, and the claims

which follow. In the figures, like reference numerals indicate like components.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

5 Fig. 1 illustrates a simple block diagram of a system, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

 Figs. 2-3 is a flow chart of software for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, partner and buyer, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

10 Figs. 4-5 is a flow chart of software for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, a partner, a reseller, and a customer, according to an embodiment of the present invention; and,

 Fig. 6 illustrates a view of a vendor's web site page, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

15

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

 Fig. 1 illustrates transaction system 50, according to an embodiment of the present invention. Transaction system 50 includes multiple processing devices coupled to Internet 880 used to facilitate a transaction between at least one vendor, at least one partner, and at least one buyer. A vendor is an entity which constructs, originates, assembles, or processes a product. In an embodiment, a vendor is a manufacturer. A partner is an entity which has business relationships with multiple vendors and provides at least one product from a vendor, or multiple vendors, to other entities, such as buyers. A buyer is an entity which purchases at least one manufactured product from a partner. In an embodiment, the buyer may be a reseller, end user, or customer which ultimately uses the manufactured product. A detailed description of an embodiment of a processing device (100, 120, 121, 130, 131) is described below.

20

25

30

Manufacturing processing device 100 includes software 102. Software 102 typically includes operating system 103, product information 104, reseller profile database 112, and transaction software 105.

5 In an embodiment, operating system 103 is Windows NT obtained from Microsoft™, Redmond, Washington.

In still another embodiment, software information 104 is a configurator and/or catalog obtained from Comergent Technologies, Inc. Buyer profile database 112 includes information regarding individual
10 buyers which is maintained by the manufacturer. The buyer profile information includes, for example, bill to address, ship to address, prenegotiated discounts, and past commerce activity.

Transaction software 105 is used to facilitate a transaction between a vendor, a partner, and a buyer as described by flow charts in
15 Figs. 2-5. In an embodiment, transaction software 105, 122 and 123 are programmed in Java™ programming language and exchange information using a transfer mark-up language ("XML") structured document.

In an embodiment, manufacturing processing device 100 is coupled to Internet 880. Likewise, multiple distributor processing
20 devices and buyer processing devices may be coupled to Internet 880. In an embodiment, partner processing devices 120 and 121, storing transaction software 122 and 123, respectively, and are coupled to Internet 880. Further, buyer processing devices 130 and 131 may also be coupled to Internet 880. In an embodiment, buyer processing
25 devices 130 and 131 store browser 132 and 133, respectively. In an embodiment, browsers 132 and 133 are Internet Explorer 5 browsers obtained from Microsoft™, Redmond, Washington.

Fig. 2 is a flow chart of transaction software 104, 105, 112, 122 and 132 illustrated in Fig. 1. In particular, Fig. 2 illustrates method 200
30 for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, a partner, and a buyer. In

an embodiment, the steps of method 200, as with other methods described herein, are performed by either computer software, computer hardware, a user, or a combination thereof. Upon entering method 200, a buyer accesses a vendor's web site as illustrated by logic block 201.

5 In an embodiment, this step may be performed by using browser 132 in processing device 130.

A determination is then made in logic block 202 where a buyer requests a needs analysis. In an embodiment of the present invention, a needs analysis may be performed by product information software 104.

10 A needs analysis will determine the system requirements for the buyer. For example, a needs analysis may ask the buyer how large his physical site is and what current technology or protocol is being used. If a buyer does not request a needs analysis, logic transitions to logic block 205; otherwise, the buyer inputs the prompted needs as illustrated by logic
15 block 203. Based upon the user's inputted needs, the buyer is presented with possible product choices as illustrated by logic block 204. In an embodiment of the present invention, product information software 104 provides such information. In alternate embodiments, product information 104 may be a product catalog which may be perused by a
20 potential buyer.

A determination is then made whether the buyer requests a configuration of the selected products in logic block 205. If the buyer does not select a configuration, logic transitions to logic block 209; otherwise, the buyer input selected products as illustrated by logic block
25 206. In an embodiment, the selected products may be products presented to the buyer in logic block 204. The vendor then configures the selected plurality of products. In an embodiment of the present invention, product information 104 may be a configurator for accomplishing such a task. The vendor would configure or determine

whether the selected products are compatible. The buyer is then presented with the configuration results as illustrated by logic block 208.

The buyer then can select a plurality of products as illustrated by logic block 209 based upon a possible needs analysis and configuration.

5 The vendor may offer promotions based on the products selected or the buyer profile.

In an embodiment, the buyer can add the selected plurality of products to a shopping cart, as illustrated by logic block 210.

10 In alternate embodiments, the buyer creates a new shopping cart in which other selected products are added. In an alternate embodiment, the buyer adds additional selected products in the existing shopping cart.

A buyer then selects a potential partner for supplying the selected products as illustrated by logic block 211. The buyer requests a price and availability from the partner as illustrated by logic block 212. The partner then provides price and availability of the products to the buyer as illustrated by logic block 213. The partner can also provide a promotional offer as illustrated by logic block 214. The promotional offer may include, for example discounts on large volume order or free shipping.

20 A buyer then can select another partner as illustrated by logic block 215 and logic blocks 211-214 are repeated. This allows for the buyer to compare price and availability from multiple partners. This method drastically reduces sales cycles and allows entities to quickly obtain customer demands.

25 After the buyer has selected a partner, having the desired price and availability of the selected products, the shopping cart is transferred to the partner's web site as illustrated by logic block 216.

30 The buyer then purchases the selected products from the partner as illustrated by logic block 217.

In an embodiment, the partner notifies the vendor of the sale of the product as illustrated by logic block 218. This allows the vendor to quickly obtain product demand from the marketplace. The partner ships the products to the buyer as illustrated by logic block 219 and the method exits.

Figs. 4-5 are a flow chart of transaction software 104, 105, 112, 122, and 132 illustrated in Fig. 1 and according to an embodiment of the present invention. In particular, the flow chart illustrates method 400 for facilitating a transaction between a vendor, a partner, a reseller and a customer. A customer would be an end user of a vendor's product according to an embodiment of the present invention. In an embodiment of the present invention, a reseller is an entity which purchases products from a distributor to resell them to an end user.

A customer accesses a vendor web site as illustrated in logic block 401. A determination is then made in logic block 402 where a buyer requests a needs analysis. In an embodiment of the present invention, a needs analysis may be performed by product information software 104. A needs analysis will determine the system requirements for the buyer. For example, a needs analysis may ask the buyer how large his physical site is and what current technology or protocol is being used. If a buyer does not request a needs analysis, logic transitions to logic block 405; otherwise, the buyer inputs the prompted needs as illustrated by logic block 403. Based upon the user's inputted needs, the buyer is presented with possible product choices as illustrated by logic block 404. In an embodiment of the present invention, product information software 104 provides such information. In alternate embodiments, product information 104 may be a product catalog which may be perused by a potential buyer.

A determination is then made whether the buyer requests a configuration of the selected products in logic block 405. If the buyer

does not select a configuration, logic transitions to logic block 409; otherwise, the buyer input selected products as illustrated by logic block 406. In an embodiment, the selected products are products presented to the buyer in logic block 404. The vendor then configures the selected plurality of products as illustrated by logic block 407. In an embodiment of the present invention, product information 104 may be a configurator for accomplishing such a task. The vendor would configure or determine whether the selected products are compatible. The buyer is then presented with the configuration results as illustrated by logic block 408.

10 The buyer then can select a plurality of products as illustrated by logic block 409 based upon a possible needs analysis and configuration. The vendor may offer promotions based on the products selected or the buyer profile.

15 In an embodiment, the buyer can add the selected plurality of products to a shopping cart, as illustrated by logic block 410.

20 A customer then selects a reseller as illustrated by logic block 411. The reseller requests pricing and availability from a partner as illustrated by logic block 412. In an embodiment, the reseller may request pricing and availability from multiple partners. This allows the reseller to provide the customer with the best pricing and availability information.

25 A partner provides pricing and availability to reseller as illustrated by logic block 413. As described above, multiple partners may provide pricing and availability to the reseller. The vendor may offer promotions based on the products selected or the buyer profile.

 The reseller then provides pricing and availability to the customer as illustrated by logic block 414.

30 The reseller then may provide a promotional offer to the customer as illustrated by logic block 415. These promotion offers may be as described above.

A customer then can select another reseller as illustrated by logic block 416 and logic blocks 411-415 are repeated. This allows the customer to compare price and availability from multiple resellers. This method drastically reduces sale cycle and allows end user to quickly
5 obtain customer demands.

As described above, the shopping cart is then transferred to the reseller's web site as illustrated in logic block 417.

The customer then may purchase products from the reseller as illustrated by logic block 418 and the reseller can ship the products to
10 the customer as illustrated by logic block 419. The method then exits.

Fig. 1 illustrates hardware and software components of an exemplary processing device 100, 130, 131, 120, and 121 for facilitating a transaction between a manufacturer, a distributor, and a reseller, according to an embodiment of the present invention. The system of
15 Fig. 1 includes a processing device 100 connected by one or more communication pathways, such as connection 112 to Internet 880 (a.k.a. the World Wide web). Processing device 100 can communicate with other local or remote processing devices, such as processing device 120, through the Internet 880. As will be appreciated, the connection
20 from processing device 100 to Internet 880 can be made in various ways, e.g., directly via connection 112 (wired or wireless), or through local-area network ("LAN"), or by modem (not shown).

In an embodiment, processing device 100 stores software 102 as described above.

25 As one of ordinary skill in the art appreciates, the various software program embodiments of the present invention may be stored on a single persistent storage device or distributed among different persistent storage devices at remote locations.

In an embodiment, processing devices 120 and 121 are
30 connected to the Internet 880 as described above, and stores

transaction software 122 and 123, respectively. Reseller processing device 130 and 131 are likewise connected to Internet 880. As one of ordinary skill in the art would appreciate, multiple other reseller processing devices and distributor processing devices may be included
5 in system 50.

In an embodiment, processing device 100 is a personal or office computer that can be, for example, a workstation, personal computer, or other single-user or multi-user computer system; an exemplary embodiment uses a Dell® Dimension® XPS B Series desktop computer
10 (Dell Computer Company, Round Rock, TX). In an alternate embodiment, processing device 100 is a personal digital assistant, handheld computer, "Smart" telephone, information appliance, or an equivalent thereof. In an embodiment, processing devices 100, 120, and 121 are servers which provide a service to another processing
15 device, such as processing devices 130 and 131. In an embodiment, processing devices 120, 121, 130, and 131 have similar hardware and software components illustrated in processing device 100.

For purposes of exposition, processing device 100 can be conveniently divided into hardware components 101 and software
20 components 102; however, persons of skill in the art will appreciate that this division is conceptual and somewhat arbitrary, and that the line between hardware and software is not a hard and fast one. Further, it will be appreciated that the line between a host processing device and its attached peripherals is not a hard and fast one, and that in particular,
25 components that are considered peripherals of some processing devices are considered integral parts of other processing devices. Thus, for example, user I/O ("input/output") 111 can include a keyboard, a touch screen, a mouse, and a display monitor, each of which can be considered either a peripheral device or part of the processing device

itself, and can further include a local printer, which is typically considered to be a peripheral.

Hardware components 101 include a processor (CPU) 107, memory 108, persistent storage 109, user I/O 111, and network interface
5 110 coupled to bus 106. These components are well understood by those of skill in the art and, accordingly, need be explained only briefly here.

Processor 107 can be, for example, a microprocessor or a collection of microprocessors configured for multiprocessing. It will be
10 appreciated that the role of processing device 107 can be taken in some embodiments by multiple computers acting together (distributed computation); in such embodiments, the functionality of processing device 107 in the system of Fig. 1 is taken on by the combination of these processing devices, and the processing capabilities of processor
15 107 are provided by the combined processors of the multiple processing devices.

Memory 108 can include a computer readable medium such as read-only memory (ROM), random-access memory (RAM), virtual memory, or other memory technologies, singly or in combination.
20 Persistent storage 109 can include a computer readable medium, for example, a magnetic hard disk, a floppy disk, or other persistent read-write data storage technologies, singly or in combination. It can further include mass or archival storage, such as can be provided by CD-ROM or other large-capacity storage technology. In an embodiment,
25 persistent storage 109 includes computer readable medium which stores software 102.

Network I/O hardware 110 provides an interface between processing device 100 and the outside world. More specifically, network I/O 110 lets processor 107 communicate via connection 112 with other
30 processing devices through the Internet 880.

Software components 102 include an operating system 103 and a set of tasks under control of operating system 103. As known by one of ordinary skill in the art, operating system 103 also allows processor 107 to control various devices such as persistent storage 109, user I/O 111, and network interface 110. Processor 107 executes the software of operating system 103 and its tasks in conjunction with memory 108 and other components of processing device 100.

In an embodiment, transaction software 105, 122, and 123, singly or in combination, is stored on a computer readable medium such as a magnetic hard disc, floppy disc, CD-ROM, or other writeable data storage technologies, singly or in combination.

Persons of skill in the art will appreciate that the system of Fig. 1 is intended to be illustrative, not restrictive, and that a wide variety of computational, communications, and information processing devices can be used in place of or in addition to what is shown in Fig. 1. For example, connections through the Internet 880 generally involve packet switching by intermediate router computers (not shown), and processing device 100 is likely to access or be accessed by any number of servers, including but by no means limited to processing device 120 and 121, during a typical web client session.

The foregoing description of the preferred embodiments of the present invention has been provided for the purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Obviously, many modifications and variations will be apparent to practitioners skilled in the art. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical applications, thereby enabling others skilled in the art to understand the invention for various embodiments and with the various modifications as are suited to the

particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the following claims and their equivalents.

CLAIMS

The claimed invention is:

1. A method for facilitating a transaction between at least one buyer, at least one partner, and at least one vendor having a computer, comprising the steps of:

(a) inputting, into the computer from the vendor, information regarding a plurality of products;

(b) inputting, into the computer from a buyer, a first and second selected product in the plurality of products;

(c) inputting, into the computer from the partner, an availability of the first and the second selected product;

(d) inputting, into the computer from the partner, an offer price for the first and the second selected product;

(e) inputting, into the computer from the buyer, an acceptance of the offer price; and,

(f) outputting, from the computer to the partner, the acceptance.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: verifying, by the computer, the first and the second product are compatible.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: inputting, into the computer by the vendor, promotional information associated with the first and the second product.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: inputting, into the computer by the partner, promotional information associated with the first and the second product.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
providing the first and second product from the partner to the
buyer.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the buyer uses a browser
for providing acceptance of the offer price.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the partner is a distributor.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
adding the first and the second product to a shopping cart.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein there is a first partner and
a second partner and the inputting of availability and price steps (c) and
(d) include inputting availability and price from the first and the second
partners, respectively.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the vendor is a
manufacturer.

11. The method of claim 3, further comprising the step of:
redirecting the browser to a partner's web site after the
acceptance of the offer.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps are at least
partially executed by a computer software programmed in a Java[®]
programming language.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps are at least
partially executed by using an XML structured document.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of:
accessing a vendor's database to obtain a buyer profile.
15. A computer for facilitating a transaction between a buyer and at least one partner, comprising:
a storage device;
a processor, coupled to the storage device,
the storage device storing a program for controlling the processor; and,
the processor operative with the program to:
(a) present information regarding a plurality of products;
(b) receive a selection of a first and a second products in the plurality of products;
(c) receive an availability of the first and the second product from a partner computer;
(d) receive a price of the first and the second product to the buyer from the partner computer;
(e) present an offer to the buyer from the partner, including the availability and the price of the first and the second product;
and,
(f) receive an acceptance of the offer from the buyer.
16. The computer of claim 15, further comprising:
a persistent storage device, coupled to the processor, for storing buyer profile information.
17. The computer of claim 15, further comprising:
the program to redirect the buyer to the partner computer.

18. A system for facilitating a transaction between a buyer, a partner, and a manufacturer, comprising:

a first processing device for presenting information regarding a plurality of manufactured products;

a second processing device, coupled to the first processing device, for (a) viewing the information regarding the plurality of manufactured products, and (b) selecting a first and a second product; and,

a third processing device, coupled to the first processing device, for providing a first price and a first availability of the first and second products to the first processing device;

wherein the first processing device provides the first price and the first availability to the second processing device, and receives an acceptance from the second processing device and forwards the acceptance to the third processing device.

19. The system of claim 18, further comprising:

a fourth processing device, coupled to the first processing device, for providing a second price and a second availability of the first and second products to the second processing device.

20. The system of claim 18, wherein the first processing device includes a manufacturer computer.

21. The system of claim 18, wherein the second processing device includes a buyer computer.

22. The system of claim 18, wherein the third processing device includes a partner computer.

23. A method for providing a plurality of products, comprising the steps of:

(a) selecting, by a buyer, a first and a second product from a first downloadable file from a web site of a manufacturer;

(b) viewing, by the buyer, in a second downloadable file, multiple offers of price and availability from a plurality of resellers; and,

(c) accepting, by the buyer, an offer in a third downloadable file containing a price and an availability of the first and second products available from a reseller in the plurality of resellers.

24. The method of claim 23, further comprising the step of responding, by the buyer, to a fourth downloadable file from the web site of the manufacturer which confirms the compatibility of the first and the second product.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the multiple offers of price and availability from a plurality of resellers is obtained from multiple respective resellers.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein the multiple offers of price and availability obtained from the multiple resellers are obtained from multiple distributors.

27. An article of manufacture, including a computer readable medium, comprising:

(a) a software program for presenting information regarding a plurality of manufactured products;

(b) a software program for receiving a selected first and a second product in the plurality of products;

(c) a software program for obtaining a first price and a first availability of the first and the second product from a first partner processing device and a second price and a second availability of the first and the second product from a second partner; and,

(d) a software program for receiving a selected partner from the first and the second partner.

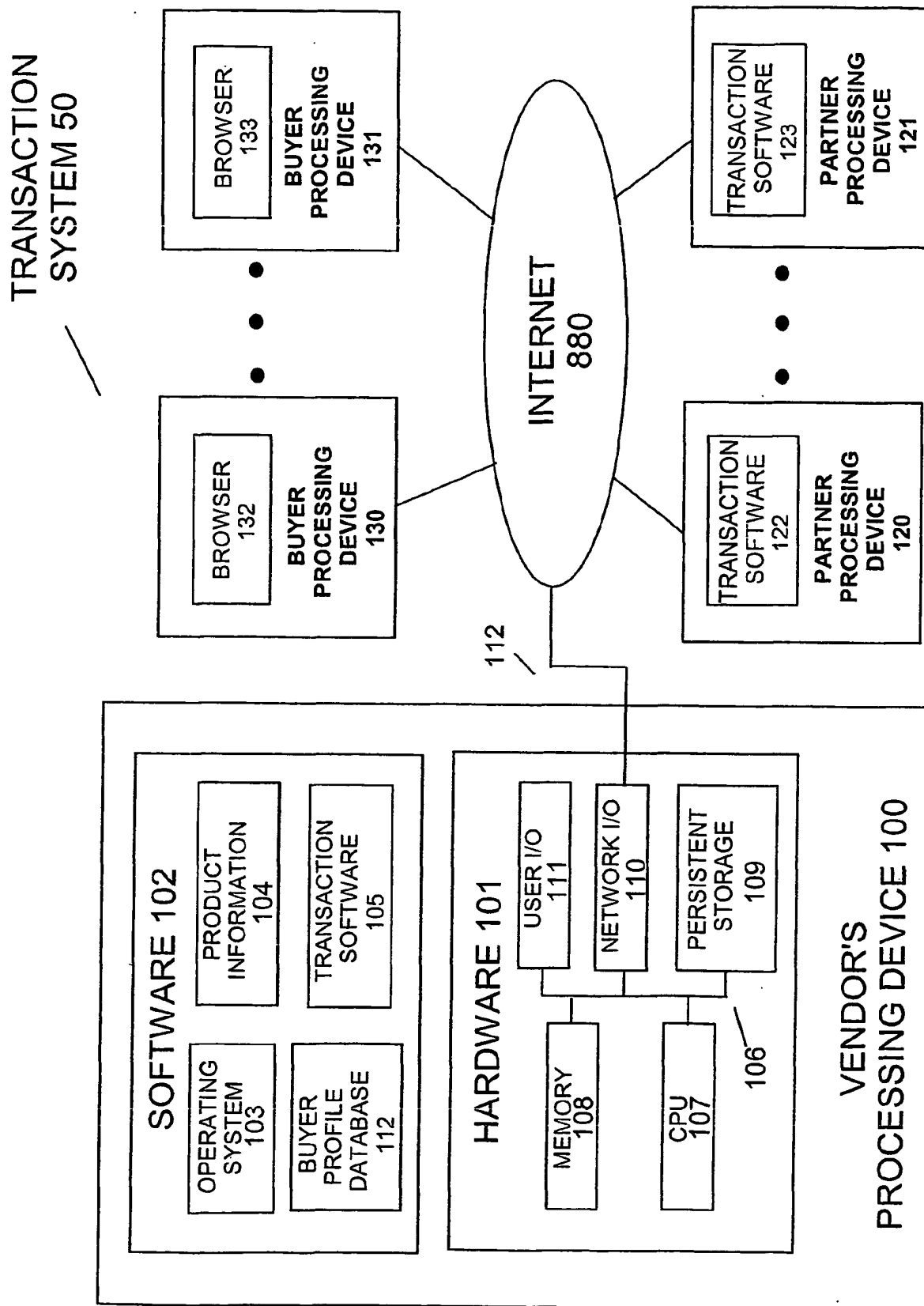


Fig. 1

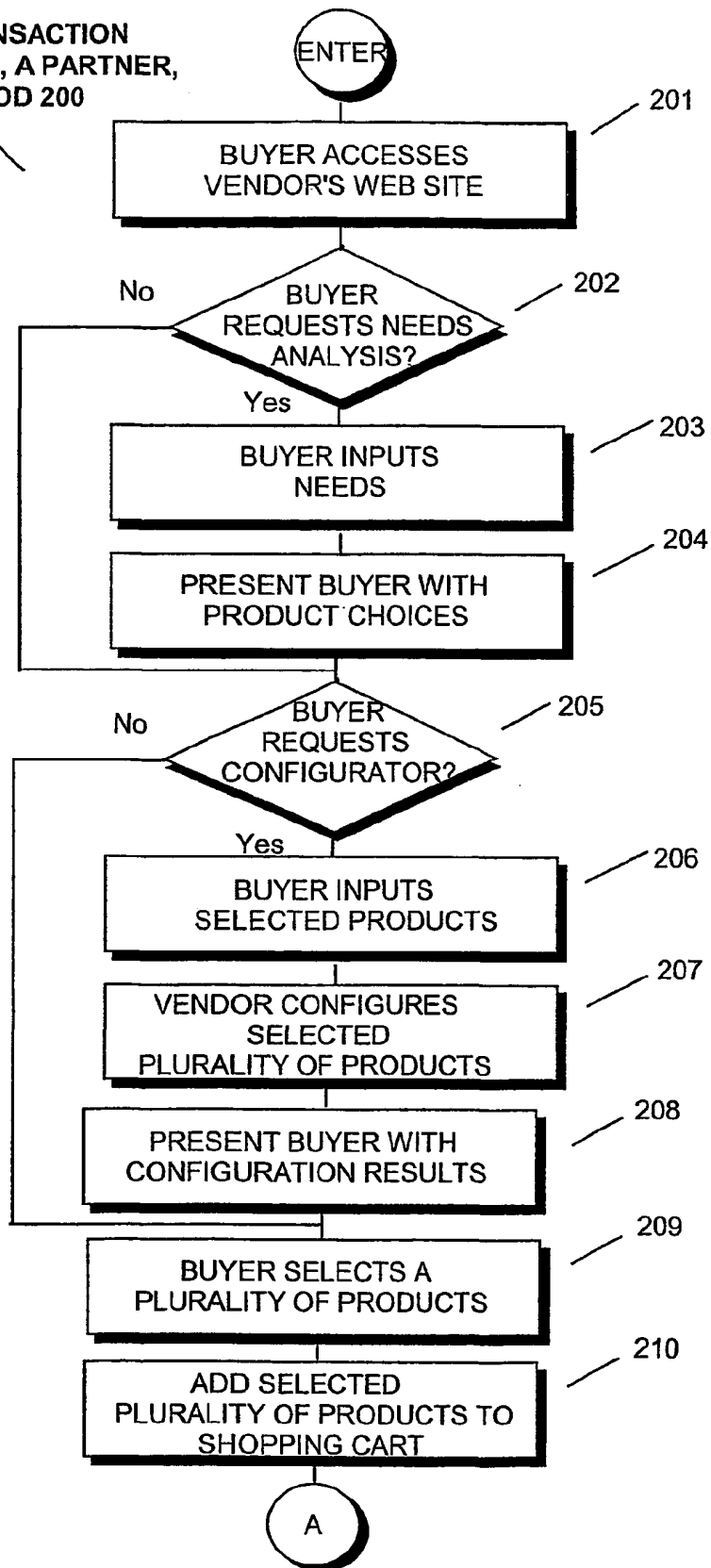
**FACILITATING A TRANSACTION
BETWEEN A VENDOR, A PARTNER,
AND A BUYER METHOD 200**

FIG. 2

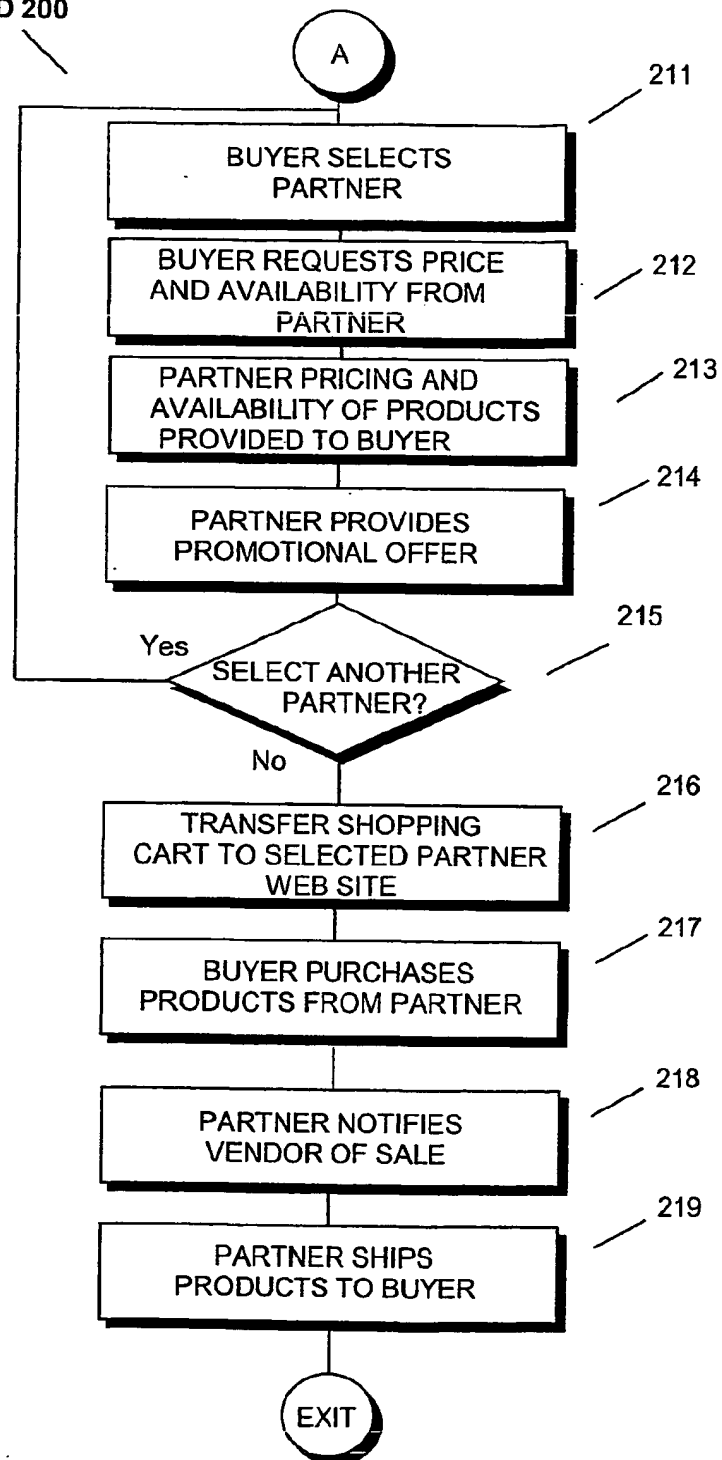
**FACILITATING A TRANSACTION
BETWEEN A VENDOR, A PARTNER,
AND A BUYER METHOD 200**

FIG. 3

**FACILITATING A TRANSACTION
BETWEEN A VENDOR, A PARTNER
A RESELLER AND A CUSTOMER
METHOD 400**

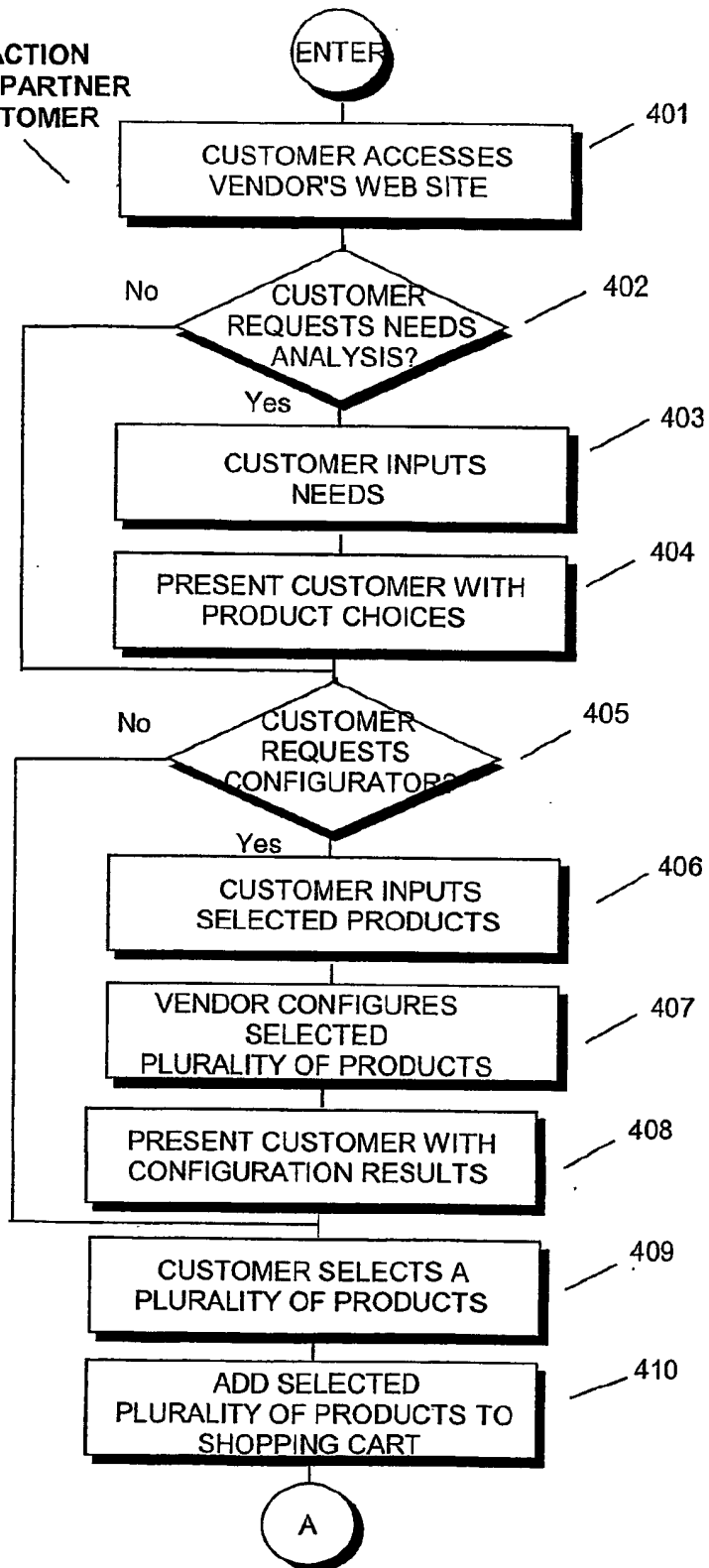


FIG. 4

**FACILITATING A TRANSACTION
BETWEEN A VENDOR, A PARTNER,
A RESELLER AND A CUSTOMER
METHOD 400**

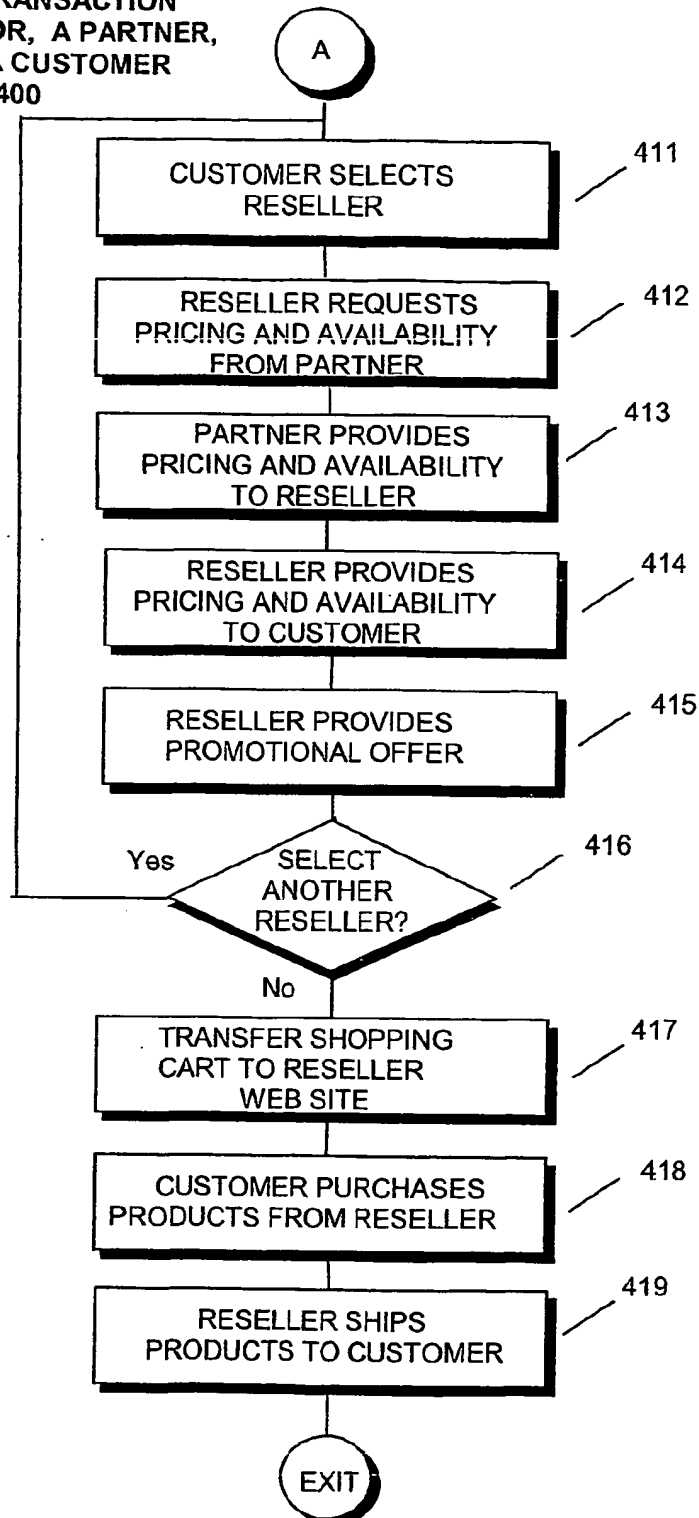


FIG. 5

THIS PAGE BLANK (USPTO)